

PFLAG-T Edmonton

November/December 1997

PFLAG-T

We are Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians, Bisexuals, Gays And Transgenders.

Our primary objectives are

- to offer mutual support to each other wherever needed;
- to invite others to share knowledge, to be free from fear, and to reach out, search and discover more about these family members and friends.



PFLAG-T SPONSORS NEW YOUTH GROUP

A Steering Committee has been formed to provide support to the new les/bi/gay/trans youth group of Greater Edmonton. Committee members bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience from fields such as psychiatry, social work, education, youth care, counselling and police services. Many thanks to all who are offering their

services to meet the needs of our youth.!

"There were no bells or fireworks to mark the new beginning, just the buzz of enthusiastic young voices. That was how THE YOUTH GROUP began on October 11. While being modelled on Youthquest!, the Lesbian and Gay Youth Society of British Columbia, it fills the same time slot and the same location as the former PTYE:

Saturdays from 8:00 to 10:00 pm. at the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre of Edmonton, Suite 103, 10612 - 124 Street.

The Steering Committee is busy at work drawing up the constitution, working guidelines and the executive, maintenance and coordinating framework: i.e. to provide, at no charge, a secure, supportive and comfortable social, historical, intellectual and emotional reality for their identity.

Support Meetings

Tues, Nov 18, 1997

&

Tues, Jan 20, 1998

Suite 103, 10612 - 124 St

7:30 pm

Everyone welcome!

Coffee will be served.

Please share this newsletter

"It's scary thinking about what would happen if people found out," was how one youth expressed his concern. As a drop-in, its basic formula, THE YOUTH GROUP will provide highly isolated and vulnerable youth opportunities to find peer support and friendship in an atmosphere free from judgment and ridicule. It will create an environment where youth do not need to wear a mask, where they can discover queer-positive role models.

Edmonton's Gay Community has an abundance of role models. The Steering Committee urges them to step forward and show the way to our youth, either by regular involvement or one-time activity organization

Adolescence is a time of exploring romantic and sexual feelings. It is where we learn appropriate ways to express affection, attraction, romantic emotions, sexual urges and gender roles. THE YOUTH GROUP intends:

- to promote positive lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual images through a speaker's series;

- to promote dialogue and understanding between youth of diverse orientations and backgrounds;
- to encourage our youth to claim their right to participate fully in the society at large;
- to take their rightful place within their home communities.

The Steering Committee has a long way to go in its work of laying the foundation for THE YOUTH GROUP. Meanwhile volunteers from the committee are facilitating the weekly Saturday group. When the work is done and the executive helm is manned by the youth, the Steering Committee believes that in answer to the question, "Will THE YOUTH GROUP program provide long term benefits to the youth of our community?" there will be a resounding YES! To offer your ideas, your help and/or your encouragement please contact Lynn at [REDACTED]

... Graham

PFLAG-T Speakers Bureau

Our speakers had a busy summer, beginning with a presentation to volunteers at the Support Network on June 26. The feedback from the audience was so positive that our speakers were invited

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back to do another presentation, as well as a large table display, on August 16.

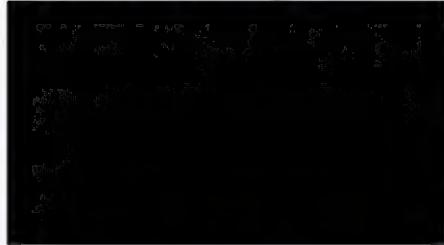
On June 26, PFLAG-T also supported the viewing of the video *It's Elementary* at the Edmonton Art Gallery Theatre and spoke to the audience about PFLAG-T's goals and activities. Proceeds were donated to the Delwin Vriend Fund.

Another Gay Pride Week activity included a large display table at The Edmonton Vocal Minority's last presentation of the season. (They did a wonderful and hilarious number on gender identity, an issue very dear to the heart of one of the singers.) Many audience members came up to the display table at intermission - one teacher even asked us to speak in his classroom in the coming school year.

Orlando Book Store very kindly allowed PFLAG-T to put up a display for the month of June. Thanks, Orlando!

Eight PFLAG-T Speakers Bureau members made their way out to Battle River on August 25 where they made a highly successful presentation to university peer counsellors. A lively question and answer session followed which showed much compassion and understanding on the part of the peer counsellors.

Members of our Speakers Bureau became a "Campers' Brunch" Bureau on the long weekend in September. Two Calgary PFLAGers joined eight Edmonton members to visit with and cook the Monday brunch for about 225 of the 300 campers at The Third Annual Great Alberta Campout. We parents had a marvelous time at this beautiful campsite, overlooking the conjunction of the Red Deer and Blindman rivers. For the Fourth Annual Great Alberta Campout PFLAG-T Edmonton hopes to sponsor a western summit of PFLAGs which would spend the Sunday exchanging ideas and hearing input from the campers as to their concerns and what PFLAG groups might do on their behalf. If your PFLAG group is interested in sending representatives next year please reply to the editor at one of the following:



Call for Submissions:

Celebrating Our Gay Family Members: An Anthology

Editors Nancy Lamkin Olson of Chicago-Lakeview PFLAG

and Laura Siegel of San Francisco PFLAG are collecting **non-fiction stories and poems for a new anthology that will celebrate our lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender family members.** Although we are both PFLAG moms, we realize that there are family members who do "celebrate" and might never have the need for PFLAG.

The anthology will include personal stories and poems from heterosexual family members that reflect the celebration of their les/bi/gay/trans family member. We hope for a broad range of topics including religion, loving a person with AIDS, gay youth, etc.

Celebration can be defined as anything from marching in a pride parade, enjoying Thanksgiving dinner together, honoring a relationship, or simply honoring your child. We leave it up to your creativity and imagination to define your own celebration.

We hope to reach lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons and their families and convey the message that it is not only possible to celebrate, it is natural, basic and inherent in the family relationship. We want to give back joy to this wonderful community that has enriched

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our lives, by sharing stories of celebration and love.

Send your nonfiction stories, poems or queries to:

Nancy Lamkin Olson, 6433 Minnehaha Ave., Chicago, Ill 60646; E-mail: celebrtn@aol.com; Web page: <http://www.critpath.org/pflag-talk/celebrations.html>

Alberta News

(Courtesy the Edmonton Journal, Sept 22, 1997)

Alberta's policy of denying homosexual people the opportunity to be foster parents is not supported by academic research, say several of North America's leading experts on parenting and child development.

In fact more than 40 years of research in Europe and North America have conclusively shown, without exception, that sexual orientation has nothing to do with either good parenting or how a child will turn out.

"To be a good parent, it isn't necessary that you have to have a mate of the opposite sex," said Dr. Susan Bradley, chief psychiatrist at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children and a specialist in child gender identity and disorder at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry.

What's far more important is to provide a warm, caring, supportive environment in which you have parents who understand children's needs, are sensitive to treating them at the age level they need to be treated, and who set limits. In other words, all the normal things that normal parents do."

Quotable Quotes

"What is important in child rearing - making healthy adults the outcome - is not family structure but family function."

Dr Martha Kirkpatrick, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst

"I tell everybody that my father was gay. Really, I'm proud of it. I'm proud of who my father was.

... Dina Billman, 16

Canadian News

A Parent's Concern: Can My Child Learn to be Gay? (Courtesy Gale Force, Sept. '97)

Dr. Kenneth Zucker, head of the Child and Adolescent Gender Identity clinic at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto, said evidence from a British national sex survey, released in 1994, suggested that "there is more same-sex experimentation among students at boarding schools, but it has no enduring impact on sexual orientation."

An enormous amount of evidence suggests that sexual orientation, or an inclination toward one, forms early. "Children are born with certain temperaments and styles," said Dr. Brian Gladue, a psychology professor at the University of Cincinnati. "Genetic and neural pathways are set up that make people responsive to certain stimuli in certain ways." Exactly how people become heterosexual or homosexual is not known, Gladue said. "We do know sexual orientation is not chosen on a day-to-day basis or picked up in school or glommed onto because your friends do it."

Zucker said the strongest predictor of adult sexual orientation was not adolescent exploration but childhood play preferences: whether boys play with boys and the kinds of toys and rough-and-tumble games boys usually prefer and whether girls play with other girls and the toys girls typically choose. These behaviours usually emerge between the ages of two and four. "The more extensive a child's pattern of cross-gender behavior during childhood," Zucker said, "the more likely he or she will be gay." There is not a perfect correlation, but it is

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"a very strong one", he contended, although less strong for girls than for boys.

One area of consensus among experts is that at least in the realm of sexuality, parents may have less control over their children's destiny than they would like. "Parents can establish conditions and boundaries," Herdt said. But he said children could not be taught desire. "That's a complex process of development more under internal control," he said.

When homosexuality loses some of its stigma, as it has in the last two decades, said Dr. Pepper Schwartz, a sociologist at the University of Washington, "some people who would be adventurous, are." She has observed what she calls "a culture of sexual experimentation" on college campuses, especially among women. "Women now believe that their sexuality is flexible and that a single sexual encounter will not define them," Schwartz said. That makes it less scary to try, and indeed, there is more sexual experimentation." Schwartz nevertheless offered a word of consolation to parents: Adolescents are "not such a delicate mechanism that some degree of experimentation is going to flip a switch."

It's a Gay Life!

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HONORED ROLE:

Gays & Lesbians Honored Throughout History.

by Don Smith

(Courtesy of First Reading,
vol 13, number 4)

By way of introduction, I'm 43 years old, male, homosexual, working class, part-time letter carrier, part-time student in Native Studies, of mixed-race ancestry (Mi'Kmaq Native American, French, Irish and Anglo-Saxon English on my father's side and Scottish, Cornish, Alsatian-German and possibly Italian on my mother's side), a survivor of abuse, a recovering addict, as well as a survivor of the mental health system and a really nice guy! After all, who is more normal than your mailman? I am writing not only from the point of view of my sexual orientation, but really from the point of view of everything that I am...



...the only thing that can be said about homosexuals or bisexuals as a group, that distinguishes us from heterosexuals, is that we love and are attracted physically to members of our own gender and we all experience the common oppression of homophobes. Also, because of that oppression, we are forced to hide our identity and only at great risk to our emotional and physical safety do we dare to express our true selves publicly. This

imposed invisibility and secrecy has a profoundly damaging psychological effect. Beyond this we are as diverse in our backgrounds and interests as the rest of the human population. I hate to throw cold water on all those fantastic stereotypes of "gay lifestyle", but we don't all subscribe to the same magazines or listen to the same music. We are not all artistic and great dancers. Some of us smoke cigarettes and some are vegetarians. Many are poor, or have no taste, so we don't all wear the latest fashion. But some way or other, at some time or other, we all came to realize that we were *different*.

I knew that I was *different* from the early age of about five, although the process of being able to name and specify the differences was more like an extremely complex tri-light which got turned on brighter and brighter as I got older. As recently as Thursday last week I had yet another light switch on with the realization that a simple touch on the

shoulder and a few kind words from another homosexual man, whom I already knew was pretty smart, could touch me in the deepest way that we can possibly touch one another - spiritually. For me, my orientation in terms of love or sex is a four-part equation linking the physical with the emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions. This is characteristic of traditional Native American philosophy.

I use the term "sexual orientation" because it has a common currency, but it seems to me that my first impulse was and is always spiritual, later becoming emotional, then mental and only lastly physical or sexual. In this sense it's more of a "spiritual orientation" than a sexual one which is perhaps why I have chosen to focus this article more spiritually than overtly sexually.

My first sense of myself as *different* was in terms of complete and loving self-acceptance. I thought of myself as a completely normal five year old. It was when I heard that wearing green on Thursday had a very weighty significance shrouded in a dark mystery of an almost unspeakable nature (that

didn't have anything to do with being proud of being Irish), that I first realized that I was in for some pretty big trouble. At that point I learned that a large majority didn't regard me as normal and I was forced to begin learning to hate myself from some extremely painful experiences of abuse (including death threats) based on the perceived threat that my differentness posed for my abusers. I had to unlearn that imposed self-hatred and relearn my sense of normal by a long and difficult process that no one should have to undergo.

The fact that it is children who learn to play this role of abuser ought to be of great concern to us all. How did our children come to be so filled with fear and hatred towards homosexuality that they could consider killing someone for merely being different?

More recently, when investigating the deeper significance of that early warning regarding the wearing of green, I was very surprised to discover that the abuse of homosexuals is a relatively recent historic phenomena, considering that we have existed as a species

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for the last two million years. Imagine my surprise in discovering that homosexual men and women were once not only highly respected but held honored sacred roles within the traditions of Native American and pre-Christian European societies from a time immemorial which forms the basis of the folklore regarding the wearing of green on Thursday. The traditional values of both Celtic-European and Native American peoples were historically forcefully suppressed by a distorted version of Christianity that bears little resemblance to the original admonishment to "love one another" taught by the son of a carpenter from Nazareth. . .

... reports have come from so many ancient authors that modern historians have deduced that while homosexuality was common and accepted among the Celts, bisexuality was likely considered the norm so that Celtic priests and priestesses were often homosexual or bisexual. Jean Markale reports discreet references to male homosexuality in some of the Irish epic narratives notable in the heroic tales of Cu Culainn and notes that there was one Celtic tribe whom the Roman historian Tacitus reported (to be) worshipping a divine male couple, whose male priests

ritually wore female clothing (not unlike Christian ministers and priests today.*)

Markdale also reports "signs of clandestine homosexuality in the institution of women warriors" and that it was a group of these "extremely mysterious warrior women, half witches, half amazons generally living in the north of Britain in the land of the Picts "who initiated the Celtic men into "the profession of arms." Judy Grahn, in a study tracing the linguistic roots of contemporary gay slang, proposes that the words *bulldike* and *bulldagger* ("mannish" lesbian) derived from the name of the Celtic-Briton female leader, Boudicca (pronounced Bo-dikeh meaning "bulldagger" or "bull altar") in her ritual role as the slayer of the sacrificial cattle, thus further affirming the importance of lesbianism within Celtic spiritual culture.

Walter Williams discusses similar traditional cultural/spiritual values present among almost all North American Indian tribal groups before European contact. Reference is also made to the existence of these same values among Indian tribes of Central America (Maya) and Brazil. This spiritual/social role, called by various names in the languages of the tribes, in

European literature is referred to by the generic term "berdache." It was common for berdaches to wear female clothing in part or total. A respected Mohave elder, in the 1930's stated: "From the very beginning of the world it was meant that there should be (berdaches), just as it was instituted that there should be shamans. They were intended for that purpose." In 1971 the Sioux shaman Lame Deer reported in reference to berdaches that "if nature puts a burden on a man by making him different, it also gives him a power." The spiritual-political power of the berdache was evident "among the Illinois and neighboring tribes, (where) the berdaches were prominently present at all the solemn ceremonies of the sacred Calumet pipe. They were summoned to the Councils, and nothing could be decided without their advice. Finally, through their profession of leading an extraordinary life, they pass for Manitous - that is to say, for Spirits, or persons of consequence. Williams also reports that the contemporary Yucatecan Mayan male population is functionally bisexual for the most part: "a large majority of the male population is at certain times sexually active with other males. This usually occurs in the years between

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13 and 30, when sexual desire is strongest, but it also involves men older than that. Marriage to a woman does not seem to have much effect on the occurrence and amount of homosexual behavior."

Reference is also made to the existence of highly respected homosexual "Amazon" roles among Native American women which enabled them to become hunters and warriors. Like their male counterparts, these amazon bowmen also cross-dressed, characteristically wearing male clothing. A hierarchy of sacred status based on gender and sexual orientation is apparent: "The Mohaves believed that female shamans were spiritually stronger than male shamans, but that berdache shamans were stronger than either."

Williams indicates that the basis for the respect accorded to the "berdache" and "amazon" was spiritual: "Native American religions, above all else, encourage a basic respect for nature. If nature makes a person different many Indians conclude, a mere human should not undertake to counter this spiritual dictate. Someone who is 'unusual' can be accommodated without being stigmatized as 'abnormal.' The berdache is thus not alien or threatening;

spirituality." The necessity of the berdache ("nadle") to Navajo society is strongly indicated in the words of a Navajo elder: "I think when all the nadle are gone, that it will be the end of the Navajo."

What different worlds these are from contemporary mainstream notions of proper sexual and spiritual roles within repressive Christianized Europe and Euro-America.

Considering that, beginning as early as 300 AD, the Christian church with the increasing support of the European states, began the suppression, persecution, torture, mutilations and eventual execution of approximately eight to 12 million pagan-Europeans during the initial 700-year period of conversion. This was followed by the murder of over one million people during the 100-year duration of five European Crusades, and with another nine million exterminated during the 400-year Inquisition ending finally in 1816.

It is small wonder that the European survivors of this holocaust should have generationally internalized such intense levels of fear and hatred towards

homosexuality and any other kind of spiritual difference.

* Editor's Note

Being Gay Not a Choice

Same-sex orientation has been observed in numerous domestic and wild animals over the centuries, for example the penguins in New Zealand. When a baby penguin loses both parents, it is a "bonded" or same-sex couple that feeds and raises the chick. What an excellent evolutionary development for the survival of the penguin species!

Same-sex attraction has also been observed in domestic dogs, to wit the following letter-to-the-editor from The Edmonton Journal, 22 August, 1997:

In the Aug. 16 Journal article "Treasurer wants gay study grant money returned," Stockwell Day is quoted as saying "We all make mistakes and they made a mistake in pursuing a project that purports to reflect the sexual choices of one percent of the population."

Day makes the same mistake Dave Hodge did when he interviewed tennis player Martina Navratilova. Dave congratulated Martina on her courage in publicly announcing her sexual choice

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of lesbianism. Martina corrected Dave, telling him it was her sexual orientation, not her sexual preference.

She pointed out that a person would have to be crazy to choose a lifestyle in which they would be ostracized by friends, schoolmates, workmates, acquaintances, relatives and even immediate family. She was merely acknowledging who she was.

An incident on a camping trip further illustrates my point. We camped with a group of people and one couple had a male poodle who was gay. He was constantly trying to have relations with other male dogs.

For his efforts he received numerous bites and savage rejections of his advances, but still he persisted in his efforts. This dog was not a product of anything his mommy and daddy said or some school incident, but was driven by an inner need.

Both Martina and the dog are part of God's creation and deserve the same respect and tolerance afforded the rest of us. Gays are present in every extended family. They have been a major part of the history of Alberta and should be remembered as such.

Wes Yeo